



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

*Office of Government Relations
88 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401*

HB0892

February 20, 2024

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 892 - Criminal Law - Benefits Trafficking

POSITION: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 892 **with an amendment**.

HB 892 addresses the issue of benefits trafficking. It defines the various techniques that traffickers use to control and exploit their victims and gain access to their benefits. It specifies criminal penalties for those convicted of these practices. This is an important issue for all who are concerned about vulnerable persons at risk of financial exploitation in our State.

In Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health Department Division of Aging has become aware of more incidents where older adults are losing control of their benefits. These incidents appear to be occurring particularly in long term care facilities, including both nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Facility employees are gaining access to the bank accounts of their residents, are withdrawing money to pay for facility care, and unilaterally assigning themselves as representative payee of the resident's benefits without the understanding or consent of the residents. Benefits affected include Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

BCA recommends that **Section 3-1301 (F) Government Benefits be amended to include Social Security and Supplemental Security Income.**

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on HB 892 **as amended**.